Jeffery's Boyhood Days

Rio Grande's President Tells the Story of His Early Struggles.

(Success for October.)

The first six years of my boyhood were passed in the cities of Liverpool, Portsmouth and Woolwich, in England. My father was a chief engineer in the British navy, and my mother lived in the places where she could see him most frequently. I remember very little about my early boyhood. My father died when I was 6 years old, and the following year, 1850, mother decided to bring the family to America, thinking it would be well for us to grow up in "the land of opportunity." We settled in Wheeling, W. Va., and there we remained until I was 13 years old.

There is little to relate about my life in Wheeling. My father left us very poor. Nearly every cent that my mother saved was spent to bring us to the United States. Shortly after we had settled here life seemed to me to bring untold woes. The future seemed to be black and uninteresting. Hardships surrounded us. I was buffeted and cuffed hither and yon. No one seemed to care whether I lived or died. I was a poor, forsaken wretch. Sometimes I had to go hungry, and often I cried from sheer misery. I remember that on one occasion, while I was chopping some wood, a man sauntered along and stood looking at me for some time. I said nothing to him, but kept on working. After some moments he said to me: "Sonny, you're not particularly sociable. Why don't you say something to a fellow?"

"If I should talk to you," I answered, "I would not be able to strike straight with my ax."

That was a pretty curt remark, I afterward thought, for the man went away rather crestfallen. But the more I thought of what I had said, the more I believed that I had made the correct answer. I was sent to school finally and what "book learning" I have was gained in Wheeling. No boy ever enjoyed going to school more than I did. A new world seemed to be opening to me. I became fond of study, and took considerable pride in my record. I never missed an examination, was never tardy and attended year after year without being absent a single day. But I played just as hard as I studied, and began to experience "the strenuous life" while still young in years. When I went home from school in the evening there were always chores to do about the house. I helped my mother with the sweeping and heavier household work, and, whenever she could spare me, I found many a way to earn an honest penny by running errands or executing some little job for a neighbor.

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I was interested in mechanics from my earliest recollection. I suppose the fact that my father was an engineer had something to do with this, and I could draw plans for engines almost before I could write. Before I was 7 years old I was using a set of mechanical drawing instruments with considerable success, and I can't remember the time when I wasn't busy with some design. It was always my ambition to work in a machine shop, and it never occurred to me that I might do better in some other line of work.

When I was 13 years old my mother decided to move to Chicago, and immediately on our arrival in that city I began to look for work. I entered an application with the Illinois Central Railroad company for a position. I told that company that I was willing to do anything. My expectations were very modest. Personally I would have preferred remaining in school a few years longer, but my mother needed money and I had to earn it. I thought that if I could take home a dollar or two every week it would be a great achievement. My ambition at that early day did not extend beyond reaping the reward of faithful and honest work in the humbler duties of my calling. It never occurred to me that I might one day be the general superintendent and manager of the great corporation into whose employ I was just entering.

My first position was in the office of Samuel J. Hayes, superintendent of machinery, where I was employed for about two months as a general errand boy. This work was little more arduous than I was used to doing at home, but I was delighted with the idea that I was actually engaged in business. My wages at the start were 45 cents a day. Several men told me that I was a fool to work for such wages, and I thought so, too, several times, but I decided to make as much of my chance as possible.

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At the end of two months I was put to work in the tin and copper shop, where I did all sorts of work, assisting the regular employes by cleaning up, and by making myself generally useful. It was while serving in this shop that I made up my mind to become a machinist. I entered an application with the railroad company for a place in the machine shops so that I could learn the trade. This I was given in a few months, and the practical training that I received in the shops has been of the greatest value to me ever since. I acquired some knowledge of carpentry and the designing of locomotives, and kept my eyes and ears open to learn all I could in every department of the work.

On July 5, 1858, Mr. Hayes gave me a position in the department of mechanical drawing, and from that time I made rapid progress. Mr. Hayes had a warm heart and was most friendly toward any boy starting in the world for himself, and, under his good counsel, I developed an ambition to fit myself for the complete mastery of both the science and art of mechanical drawing and engineering. I began a course of systematic study, which I continued for ten years. Mr. Hayes soon saw I was in earnest, and he accorded me the privilege of studying during office hours whenever my duties permitted. I also studied at home in the evenings, and was able to make short work of some books I had. Being regularly employed in the drawing department, I was able to demonstrate the principles of my calling in a practical way. I perceived that it is useless to acquire book knowledge without knowing how to put it into operation, and I applied in my own self-training the principle now advocated by the most advances educators—that of combining the labor of the hand with that of the brain, in order to meet the practical demands of an industrial calling.

It is probable that I may encourage many young men to study at home when I say that, at 18 years, I was on the pay roll of the Illinois Central Railroad company as a regular mechanical draughtsman. This position would not have been possible for me at that age if I had not used every spare moment to improve my knowledge of my profession. When I was 20 years old I was placed in full charge of the department of mechanical drawing.

The question is often asked whether I consider a college or technical course essential to success in a mechanical career, and I invariably reply in the negative. Practical experience is essential, most of all; and, if a young man can have a good college education in addition, it is a very good thing, but it is quite possible for any boy to advance himself through his own efforts at self-culture. I continued my work and studies with such profit, while I was with the company, that, at the age of 25, I found myself in possession of the entire range of sciences adapted to the highest efficiency in my occupation, and by general reading I had also gained some breadth of general culture.

When I was placed over the department of mechanical drawing I was also made private secretary to the superintendent of machinery. At the age of 28 I was appointed assistant superintendent of machinery by John Newell, then president of the company. Mr. Newell was a typical example of a self-made railroad man and was never slow in opening the way for promotion to deserving and energetic employes. It has always been my experience that railroad officials are willing to advance their men just as soon as they deserve it, and are quick to recognize a young man who is really anxious to improve his position.

When I was a very young man in Chicago I was interested in every organization which would assist me in my studies. For several years I was president of the Young Men's Literary society, an institution which did much to foster a literary spirit among a large number of citizens, and, while I was a member, I used to write verses and essays. The following verses describing the object of our society were written by me more than thirty-five years ago:

OUR DUTY.

The heart that is sad where a heart should be light,
Or false where a heart should be true,
Let us guide through the darkness obscuring the light,
And point to the future eternal and bright,
And teach it to dare and to do.

The soul that is darkened by passion and crime,
Let us win from its idols of clay,
And lead to the heroes and sages sublime,
Whose names are inscribed on the records of time;
Undying immortals are they.

Let us fight for the right, though the struggle be long,
With firm and unswerving desire,
Let us manfully battle oppression and wrong,
With hearts that are earnest and trusty and strong;
With God and the Truth to inspire.

Let us dare to be noble men, nature's own pride,
And dare to be true to each other,
For the earth is a homestead so fruitful and wide,
We can live, we can love, we can toil, side by side,
And each unto all be a brother.

So great was my gain in knowledge and experience from my connection with the Young Men's Literary society that I am sorry such organizations are not so popular now as they used to be.

I remained with the Illinois Central Railroad company for a great many years, and, having started as a chore boy and mechanic's apprentice, I was able to bring to my duties a practical management. The three principal ideas which governed my actions during my official railroad career were to establish mutual confidence and kindly relations between the corporation and its employes, to gain the respect of the general public and bring about a clearer and more intelligent comprehension of the relations between the people and the carriers, and to so conduct corporate affairs as to secure and retain the confidence of the financial world.

WU TING FANG'S VIEWS.

What the Eminent Chinese Diplomat Thinks of America.

(Wu Ting Fang in Success.)

Americans are known, in whatever quarter of the world chance happens to throw them, by their marvelous self-reliance and independence. A typical American is never at a loss what to do with himself.

If, by some enchantment, he were whisked away over night and set down in the middle of Timbuctoo, he would, doubtless, when he should awake the next morning, be astonished, but before luncheon he would be busily engaged in some business enterprise, so readily does he adapt himself to circumstances. In every instance he knows how to take care of himself, but perhaps the real secret of his success is that he knows how to make the most of his opportunities.

An American student usually realizes that education is the stepping stone to achievement. He studies with the expectation of fitting himself for the profession or occupation he is ultimately to enter. He makes the most of himself as a student, that he may be able to make the most of himself in his chosen career.

All through his course of study this idea is instilled into his mind, and the consequence is that he leaves his college or university well prepared to enter upon life's activities. He is sure of himself.

I may also add that the schools of the United States, both public and collegiate, are the crowning glory of this young and great republic. No words can bestow upon them too high praise. No estimate can be put upon the good which they are accomplishing in training young women as well as young men for future usefulness. Systematic education is reaching its highest form in this country. Its results are so practical that the country cannot help but advance.

The intelligence of the average American is worthy of note. This, I take it, is due in large measure not only to the excellent schools, but also to the innumerable newspapers and other publications. I have found, in all parts of the country, that in every town of any size there is published a daily paper, and that the metropolitan publications circulate in the homes of the most remote corners of the land.

The ability to seize his opportunities, which is characteristic of the American, is seen in the business enterprises of the country. Its industrial machinery is adjusted to the production of its wealth on a scale of unprecedented magnitude.

This is a valuable condition. American brains and American capital are reaching out to control the markets of the world, and, with good reason, other nations are watching the efforts with keen interest. China is but awakening to its vast possibilities, and more and more will she welcome the American merchant and American commerce within her borders. American enterprise is now building a railway from Hankow to Canton, and, no doubt, other roads will soon be building. China's rivers and harbors are to be improved, and there will be more and more demand for American steel, rails and other products.

THE MAN WHO WALKS.

A Cheery Sermon For Hustlers on Two Feet.

(Philadelphia Ledger.)

We are entering upon a most delightful period of the year, when a walk afield takes on the semblance of a duty. One of our accredited writers tells us with charming frankness that perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business is only to be sustained "by perpetual neglect of many other things, and it is by no means certain that a man's business is the most important thing he has to do." A walking tour, according to two brilliant essayists, William Hazlitt and Robert Louis Stevenson, is the ideal way to cast off the burden of daily care. Some of the finest sentiment to be found in the books is the emanation of the saunterer's brain. We recur to Bayard Taylor's "Views Afoot" and to Charles Dudley Warner's "Wanderings" and "Saunterings" with unending pleasure. "Adirondack" Murray's journeyings opened a mountain vista which will never lose its impressiveness.

Nature is prone to hide her most alluring nooks from all explorers save those who approach them afoot. A tourist willing to undertake infinite labor to gain a certain summit of the Adirondacks to get the best view of the sunset was rightfully set down by the knowing guides as a man of superior quality. Hazlitt's conception of happiness was "the clear blue sky over my head, the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me and a three hours' march to dinner." Stevenson makes much of the rest after a day's walk:

"You lean from your window, your last pipe reeking whitely in the darkness, your body full of delicious pains, your mind enthroned in the seventh circle of content. * * * At least you have had a fine moment, and looked upon all the kingdoms of the earth; and, whether it was wise or foolish, tomorrow's travel will carry you, body and mind, into some different parish of the infinite."

In the era of the bicycle, the electric car and the automobile there is some danger that real walking will become obsolete. Occasionally we meet a sinewy representative of the old school striding along the highway, but more frequently the byway, striving to keep alive the fine old traditions concerning the joy, the inspiration and the healthfulness of mere walking. Now and then is discovered, even in town, a resolute disciple of the cane, a robust old fellow who on principle never rides from his home to his office or his store, probably a mile away, though a car is going that way in which he could ride for a trifle.

Persons of this sturdy and intrepid stamp are becoming so rare that they are pityingly regarded by the common herd of riders as eccentrics, curious survivals of the walking age. A brisk five-mile walk into the country has become an adventure. A man or woman who can accomplish the feat and report for duty in good trim the next day is something of a hero.

'POSSUM STORY WON VOTES.

Mean Trick of a White Man Worked on Sympathy of Negroes.

(Philadelphia Ledger.)

"I was once," said a noted politician in Georgia, "a candidate for congress. The two parties were equally divided in the upper end of the district, and in the black belt the negroes held the balance of power. I was making a stump speech to a mixed audience in which the negroes predominated. My opponent was a new importation from Maine. He was making great promises of what he would do when he went to Washington, and the negroes believed every word he said. I had to counteract it.

"I told them the 'possum story in which two old darkies had been out hunting. In the early party of the night they had got a good fat 'possum, and they decided to build a fire, dig a pit and put the 'possum to barbecue. This they did and stretched themselves off on the ground to sleep, intending to get up before day, eat the 'possum and start out on another hunt.

"In the 'wee sma' hours' a wandering white man, attracted by the light, came up, smelled the 'possum, took it out of the pit and quietly devoured it. He then piled up the bones between the snoring hunters, gently rubbed their lips and faces with 'possum grease and hastened away.

"Day was breaking when the 'possum hunters awoke, and to their amazement, found the 'possum gone. They saw the bones, smelled the grease and placed their hands upon their empty—hearts. Each began to accuse the other of eating the 'possum, and they had almost come to blows when they espied the white man's tracks and an old letter which had fallen from his pocket. They saw that they had been tricked.

"I made the application to my opponent who was seeking their votes. 'Now,' I said, in concluding, 'the 'possum's ready, roasted nice and brown. Who's to have him, this roving carpet bagger or—'

"'You tek um! You tek up! We's all gwine to vote fur yer, bress Gawd!'

"And I got the 'possum."

Could Take His Choice.

(Philadelphia Times.)

Some time ago a white man was arraigned before a colored justice on the charge of killing a man and stealing a mule. The prisoner remarked:

"Judge, I believe you've no jurisdiction, only to examine me, but do the best you can for me."

"Dat's what I'se gwine ter do; I'se got two kinds of law in this court—de Arkansaw and de Texas. Which do you want?"

"I believe I'll take the Arkansas."

"Well, in that case, I'll dismiss you for stealing de mule—and hang you fer killing de man."

"I believe, judge, that I'll take the Texas."

"Well, in dat case, I'll dismiss ye fer killing de man"—

"You have a good heart, judge."

"An' hang ye for stealin' de mule. I'll take de occasion to say that de only difference is in the way you state de case."

He Found the Doctor.

(New York Times.)

At an assembly of charity workers at a settlement house on the east side, preparing for the fall campaign, Mr. Calvin Brewster narrated a story of a mendicant who very much needed a pair of trousers. Remembering that physicians were compelled to wear high-grade clothing, he wandered up above the Plaza on Fifth avenue and, observing the name of a physician on a large silver plate on the door of a fine-looking residence, he ascended the steps and rang the doctor's bell. An elderly, sweet-faced lady came to the door, and the impoverished caller said:

"'Madam, I am very hard up and have called to see if I could obtain a pair of the doctor's cast-off trousers."

"I am the doctor,"

The lady smiled at him and replied: